


Catholic-Themed Literature in the Secondary Language Arts Classroom

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pamela M. Hartman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'P' and 'H'.

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Abstract

While multicultural education is a popular topic among contemporary scholars, little substantial research exists regarding methods for incorporating religious examinations of literature into public school classrooms. In the secondary language arts classroom, educators tend to either ignore or do a disservice to works of literature whose mere existence and rhetorical purposes stem from the religious concerns of the author. Catholic literature is one subgenera of religious literature that has been largely ignored or improperly examined in the language arts classroom. Prose by writers such as James Joyce, Flannery O'Connor, and Evelyn Waugh and poems by poets such as Gerard Manley Hopkins and Denise Levertov are often taught without due attention to the religious perspectives on which the novels and poems hinge. Therefore, this project takes aim at the current problem of omitting religious examinations of text from the language arts classroom by providing (1) a review of literature that explores the research supporting religious literature in the classroom, (2) discussions of methodology, findings, and legal and pedagogical cautions of teaching religious texts in public schools, and (3) appendices which contain instructional guides for specific works of Catholic-themed literature in the language arts classroom.

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Catholic-Themed Literature in the Secondary Language Arts Classroom

I. Overview

Religion and literature have been inseparable for ages. From the time of the ancient Greeks, the religion of an author has inspired literature from the epics of Homer to the tales of Chaucer, the plays of Shakespeare to the apologetics of prophets and saints, the musings of Joyce's artist to the Southern gothic stories of Flannery O'Connor. However, T.S. Eliot, himself a convert to Anglo-Catholicism, noted an "irrational" trend arising in the twentieth century to separate literary and religious perspectives of literature. In his essay "Religion and Literature," Eliot states:

I am convinced that we fail to realize how completely, and yet how irrationally, we separate our literary from our religious judgments. If there could be a complete separation, perhaps it might not matter: but the separation is not, and can never be, complete. (100)

Indeed, in many scholarly pursuits of literature, the religious aspect of text is treated as secondary to literary aspects.

Eliot's comments about our methods of "judging" literature also evoke consideration of a trend in modern education to avoid religious issues in the classroom. Since the 1960s, when legislation was passed to ban school-sanctioned prayer in public schools, the American educational system generally tends to avoid religious discussion, not necessarily because educators deem religion a non-academic subject, but out of fear of offending students' rights to individual religious aspirations and of the legal consequences of such an offense.

Thus, in the secondary language arts classroom, educators tend to either ignore or do a disservice to works of literature whose mere existence and rhetorical purposes stem from the

religious concerns of the author. Prose by writers such as James Joyce, Flannery O'Connor, and Evelyn Waugh and poems by poets such as Gerard Manley Hopkins and Denise Levertov are taught without due attention to the religious perspectives on which the novels and poems hinge.

Religious aspects of text could and ought to be addressed from a multicultural perspective in the language arts classroom. And if approached in an appropriate manner, such an endeavor could be executed with less difficulty. While multicultural education is a popular topic among contemporary scholars and even though many such scholars have acknowledged the possibility of addressing religious issues from a multicultural perspective in the classroom, little substantial research exists regarding methods for incorporating religious examinations of literature into public school classrooms.

Catholic literature is one subgenera of religious literature that has been largely ignored or improperly examined in the language arts classroom. Mary Reichardt, author of the *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature*, notes that “even in English departments at Catholic institutions, it has for years now been rare if not impossible to find courses that examine texts from a religious, much less Christian or Catholic, perspective” (2). As a Catholic, I take concern at seeing my religion marginalized along with most other religions in an attempt to avoid controversy in the educational setting. Thus, my project takes aim at the current problem of omitting religious examinations of text from the language arts classroom through a literature review, which explores the research supporting religious literature in the classroom; discussions of methodology, findings, and legal and pedagogical cautions; and appendices which contain instructional guides for specific works of Catholic-themed literature in the language arts classroom.

II. Literature Review

Mary Reichardt's *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature* serves as the primary authoritative text chronicling Catholic literature throughout history. No anthology of Catholic literature exists, and Reichardt's two-volume encyclopedia, while thorough in its examination of the texts' themes and author biographies, covers only a limited number of Catholic works. Reichardt admits the incompleteness of her text and includes an extensive list of further reading in an appendix. Since the text was recently published (2004), Reichardt's work indicates interest and growth in the documentation of Catholic literature, and her research leaves room and provides opportunity for further collections and potential anthologies of Catholic literature.

Reichardt's *Encyclopedia*, despite its incompleteness, is an excellent source for educators looking to incorporate Catholic-themed literature into the language arts classroom. In addition, Reichardt has also published *Exploring Catholic Literature: A Companion and Resource Guide*. The guide, like the encyclopedia, provides author biographies and themes but also includes suggested critical resources and discussion questions for many of the texts described in the encyclopedia. While *Exploring Catholic Literature* is an excellent source for both educators and students, the book is aimed primarily at the individual reader. Besides including the list of discussion questions for each text, Reichardt does not suggest any other methods for incorporating Catholic-themed literature and the religious issues of text into the classroom setting.

No pedagogy and methods research exists specifically regarding Catholic-themed texts in the language arts classroom. The *Catholic Educator's Research Center* at <http://www.catholiceducation.org> includes an "Arts and Literature" page that provides current reviews and essays on various works of recent and classic literature, but like Reichardt's texts,

the online source fails to offer any methods or pedagogical research for implementing such texts into the classroom.

Yet authors like Reichardt and writers like Eliot call for the inclusion of religious examinations of literature in educational settings. Eliot, in his essay “Religion and Literature,” states that “the ‘greatness’ of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards” (97). Reichardt addresses this concept of a multifaceted examination of literature from a spiritual perspective in the introduction to *Exploring Catholic Literature*:

Any approach to literature that is closed off from even the possibility of the spiritual is woefully deficient. If literary works have no foundation in truth or ability to address ultimate concerns, the study of literature and the endless production of literary criticism become only a rarified, elitist game. (3)

When administrators and educators omit religious examinations of literature from the curriculum, not only are they depriving students of a complete multicultural awareness, but they severely limit students’ abilities to approach literature. Literature personifies values, and if students are not encouraged to measure a work of literature against their own values and their awareness of cultural values, they fail to fully read a text. Furthermore, Reichardt argues that the theoretical tools educators use to examine literature not only omit religious examinations of a text, but act as the antithesis of such examinations:

For more than a generation now, literary studies in both secular and private institutions have been dominated by postmodern critical theories that, with their emphasis on deconstructing literature and thoroughly politicizing its content, are largely antithetical, if not downright hostile, to Christian thought. (2)

Reichardt argues that the resistance to Catholic literature in the classroom stems from the dominance of secular literary approaches to text:

Catholic literature, a long and rich tradition indeed, has been ignored precisely because it *must* be examined from a Catholic perspective in order to comprehend it in its totality. Trained in critical methods that deny or discount the existence of God, lacking a scholarly understanding of Catholic teaching, or simply embarrassed to talk about faith in the classroom, many faculty simply choose to ignore Catholic literature. (2)

Whatever the reasons for excluding substantive examinations of Catholic literature in the classroom, its absence indicates a general absence of religion and values in contemporary pedagogical approaches to the teaching of literature.

This absence has led to a general concern for the values, analytical processes, and multicultural awareness of students in the current public school system. Howard M. Miller, in an article titled “Teaching and Learning about Cultural Diversity,” agrees that “religious perspectives can and ought to be part of the study of art, literature, and history” (317) and also argues that “a healthy dose of religion would help, rather than hinder, the goal of promoting multicultural understanding” (316).

Miller’s argument, along with other similar arguments about the study of religion in public schools, is supported by a recent study (1999) by Ribak-Rosenthal and Kane that concluded:

Despite the increasing emphasis on multicultural sensitivity in education and counseling, at least one large gap remains in multicultural competence. Based on the results of this study, it seems apparent that a central aspect of culture—religion—is being largely ignored. (148)

The study measured students' knowledge of various religious holidays, prohibitions, and founders or prophets of several different religions while taking into consideration whether students had completed a religious studies course. Among Riback-Rosenthal and Kane's results, one statistic indicated that even in courses concentrating on multiculturalism, religion is omitted from the curriculum:

Although only 23 (20%) of the participants had completed a comparative religion course, 71 (85%) had completed a course dealing with multiculturalism. Of this group of 71 individuals, only 29 (35%) indicated they covered religion in the multicultural class. (145)

Riback-Rosenthal and Kane also note an earlier study by Riback-Rosenthal and Russell (1994) which found that "in December, non-Christian children scored significantly lower in self-esteem and perceptions of the classroom environment than did their Christian counterparts" (143). Considering this earlier finding and the results of their current study, Ribak-Rosenthal and Kane suggested:

Because of lack of knowledge of nonmajority religious customs, beliefs, and traditions, educators may inadvertently harm children. Knowledge of various religious customs and beliefs, on the other hand, may help both the adults and the children in our schools work toward a more accepting and inclusive environment. (143)

While a primary argument in favor of the omission of religion from school curricula is that religion in schools can be offensive and intrusive and, consequently, harm students' self-image, research indicates that religious awareness actually promotes more positive and "inclusive" environments.

Thus, more resources are necessary regarding methods for incorporating religious issues into the classroom. While no methods resources on Catholic literature exist, Anne M. Will has published an article entitled “To See the Other as Other: Thoughts on the Teaching of Religion” that provides some methods and pedagogical suggestions for a unit comparing Buddhist and Christian “concept[s] of self” (7). Will’s research serves as a crucial reference in designing a curriculum that involves religion. One of Will’s goals, which ought to be a primary goal of any multicultural study of religion, aims to help students “to recognize and accept the reality of the other” and to gain “some insight into the structure of their own belief system” (18). Will suggests that educators attain these goals with their students through “interreligious dialogue,” a sort of open forum in which students can express and defend their worldviews or personal beliefs and compare them to others in an environment that encourages tolerance and understanding (1). The educator, then, would take the responsibility of creating a tolerant environment and gearing students comments toward the goal of understanding rather than controversy.

Will suggests that the best method for creating such an environment and instigating interreligious dialogue is to concentrate on a single theme. In her unit, she uses the theme of “self, as conceived in each tradition” (1). Students engage in interreligious dialogue regarding a number of subsequent topics such as moral reasoning, wrong-doing, free will, determinism, and salvation—all relating to the concept of self in each religious tradition. Will cites a “continuum of intercultural awareness” that finds students among six different stages: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration (3). Will warns educators that different students will think at different stages of the continuum and that educators should not force to intercultural awareness but guide students along the path toward integration.

Will's definition of acceptance differs slightly from the type of acceptance I hope to promote with this project. Will claims that "within an interreligious dialogue, acceptance means an acknowledgement that the other has different, but equally valid answers to the great spiritual questions" (18). She acknowledges that such acceptance will be difficult for some students because it suggests "a cultural relativism" (18). Students should not be encouraged to accept cultural relativism as truth, nor should they be evaluating their peers' comments as "valid answers." The issue of validity of religion does not belong in the public school system since it is a subject of belief. Instead, educators should promote a type of acceptance that acknowledges the different beliefs of others in the spirit of understanding and tolerance.

Will, however, succeeds in acknowledging the most important goal of promoting a multicultural religious acceptance in schools—promoting harmony among people of varying cultural beliefs and practices:

In the present historical context of widespread spiritual malaise, global violence and environmental deterioration, there is much to be gained from such discussions. (20)

Ultimately, we can only attain the acceptance necessary for such harmony if we allow open discussion of difference and meet that dialogue with an open mind.

III. Methodology

Process of Compilation

I developed the idea of designing teaching guides for works of Catholic-themed literature after reading G. K. Chesterton's apologetic text, *Orthodoxy*. While I would not necessarily choose to incorporate that specific work into a language arts curriculum, I appreciated the questions it generated for me as a Catholic and as a student. I began to question why I was never exposed to sophisticated religious literature during my education at a parochial Catholic high

school. Catholic theology instruction was limited to one period of theology class each day. The rest of the curriculum closely resembled that of public high schools. Thus, my initial concept was to create sources for Catholic educators to incorporate into the language arts curricula of Catholic school systems.

The more I thought about my project, I began to realize that discussion functioned as the best and most necessary method for approaching religious issues in literature, even in a parochial school setting. Opening issues of Catholic theology to discussion would permit potential dissent among students, and the type of discussion that would ensue would be remarkably different from the sort of catechism-based instruction of a Catholic theology curriculum. Such discussion about Catholic beliefs and practices might at times be at odds with the pedagogical goals of Catholic school administrators.

However, if religious issues could be approached from a multicultural perspective in classrooms of primary subjects besides theology, the difficulties stemming from questioning and dissent might begin to take a more academic form of examining the history, precepts, and motivations of a religion. In this case, my teaching guides for works of Catholic-themed literature, now focused on interreligious discussion from a multicultural perspective, would apply in any secondary-level language arts classroom. My goal thus became not only to infuse the language arts curricula of Catholic schools with discussion of Catholic theology, but also to bring religious discussion back into the language arts curricula of public schools to allow high school students to develop both an academic multicultural awareness of other religions and a fuller comprehension of their own worldviews and beliefs by examining them against the beliefs of many other peoples.

Texts

The texts I chose for the teaching guides in my project came from a variety of sources including webpages dedicated to Catholic literature, suggestions from Catholic friends and teachers, my personal literature preferences, and the *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature*, a two-volume reference set compiled by Mary Reichardt. Each guide contains an introduction that frames the Catholic elements of the text within the author's association with Catholicism; a list of terms, people, and stories that would likely be unfamiliar to non-Catholics; and a written analysis including Catholic themes and motifs; and methods and discussion questions to aid in teaching the text. The guides are not meant to be lesson plans that contain all the information for teaching a given text. Instead, they serve as starting points for an educator who might be interested in deciding which Catholic-themed text would work best for his/her curriculum, which concepts might need further explanation, which themes might lend themselves to interreligious discussion, and which methods might work for teaching students about Catholicism through literature. My goal is that the teaching guides prompt teachers to consider including Catholic-themed literature in their classrooms and to address the religious themes present in the literature.

IV. Findings

Educational projects often stem from the initial goals of the educator. In conceiving of this project, my first objectives involved promoting Catholic-themed texts that have often been ignored or avoided in the language arts classroom and awakening interest in religious studies, an area that has long been silenced in the public secondary school classroom. As I indulged in the research for my project, I developed a list of objectives that might shape my project and potential units or studies of Catholic-themed literature in the classroom.

Promote "interreligious dialogue." As I mentioned earlier, the public school system has all but silenced academic discussions about religious practices. Anne M. Will addresses this

silence in her article “To See the Other as Other: Thoughts on the Teaching of Religion” by providing advice for encouraging what she calls “interreligious dialogue” (3). Will views such dialogue as a two-fold process to “cultivate a recognition” of the religious practices of the “other” and to “deepen [students’] understanding of their own religious traditions” (3). My primary objectives in creating this collection of teaching guides for Catholic-themed literature are to provide opportunities for students to discover a context for their worldviews and to encourage students to broaden those worldviews by examining other perspectives. Consequently, discussion ought to be the primary method used to teach and study issues brought up by the Catholic-themed texts. The novels, stories, and poems discussed in the teaching guides should serve two purposes: to provide information about the Catholic faith and practice through the lens of the author and to act as springboards for interreligious dialogue.

Combat ignorance and stereotypes. Because schools do not typically promote interreligious dialogue, most high school students develop stereotypes about “other” religions because their educators have left them ignorant of the theologies that guide those religions. Catholicism is only one religion of which many students remain ignorant and harbor stereotypes. While more students in the US are likely to be brought up by families who subscribe to Christianity, the Christian denomination is likely to be Protestant. The perception that these students have of Catholicism is often shaped primarily by ignorance of family and church members or by the historical information they encounter during a study of the Reformation. Students not from Christian backgrounds often have similar or fewer encounters with information about Catholicism. Either way, the information about Catholicism that high school students encounter is often biased or dated and needs to be addressed from more positive and modern viewpoints provided by the Catholic-themed literature in this project. Thus, my second

goal is to combat ignorance and stereotypes by presenting fresh information about Catholicism through literature and discussion in an attempt to provide students with a more complete picture of the world.

Promote multicultural awareness. Because conversion is not the goal of interreligious discussion, religious studies in secondary public schools must concentrate on religion only as a multicultural issue. Religion is itself a cultural practice, so to study “other” religions demands that students engage in multicultural studies. Religion often reflects a culture or stems from cultural beliefs and practices, and often the events of a group’s cultural history are entangled with religious issues. Several of the Catholic-themed texts demonstrate how Catholicism relates to political issues or historical events. Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* combines the main character’s theological questioning with Irish culture and post-WWI politics. O’Connor’s stories provide Catholic moral reasoning against the backdrop of the landscapes, dialects, and lifestyles of the American South. And Blatty’s *The Ninth Configuration* juxtaposes the tragedy of war with philosophical debates about the existence of God. The combination of religious studies with other aspects of multicultural studies helps students become aware of the reasons for many of the cultural differences they encounter.

Inspire students to learn more about their own personal cultural practices and worldviews. While interreligious dialogue provides students an opportunity to learn about worldviews other than their own and to develop an understanding of religions from a multicultural perspective, such discussion prompts students to engage in intrapersonal reflection on their own thoughts about religion. In order to represent their own beliefs, students must first sort through their understanding of their own worldviews and perhaps even consult resources to accurately represent their belief systems. Thus, before the interreligious dialogue begins,

students start an intrapersonal reflection that, ideally, will continue throughout the class discussions as they begin to examine the beliefs of others against their own. Furthermore, religious-themed literature works as an ideal source for prompting intrapersonal reflection in response to religion because the texts put the worldviews of another in a narrative context that demonstrates how the religion affects the lives of the characters. The literature offers another lens through which to view one's own belief system. In response to the literature, students reflect not only on concepts in discussion but on how those concepts play out in a controlled context.

Promote an interdisciplinary curriculum. Religious-themed literature is only one way that students can learn about religions from a multicultural perspective. A variety of disciplines including history, biology, the social sciences such as philosophy and sociology, fine arts such as music and visual art, and even mathematics can offer perspectives crucial to religious education and interreligious dialogue. The best way to include religious-themed literature in the secondary-level classroom is in interaction with a variety of topics concerning religion in an interdisciplinary context. I hope that this project and the teachers who use these guides to include similar projects in their classrooms encourage educators in other disciplines to work together to bring interreligious dialogue into their classrooms.

IV. Cautions

Legal Cautions

The discussion of religion in any public school classroom is likely to spark concern of objections from students, parents, and administrators. However, concern about the issue of religion in the classroom does not mean that the subject should be avoided. In fact, the controversy over the issue may be the strongest indication that we need to be addressing religion

and the concerns that come with such theology-related discussions. Even so, a few necessary precautions and methods for addressing the concerns of parents, administrators, and most importantly, students are necessary to consider before planning and teaching a text or unit of religious-themed literature.

Legal issues are likely to be one of the greatest concerns for teachers and administrators. Many teachers simply overlook the religious motifs and themes in a piece of literature, or they avoid teaching any texts with religious references out of fear that they will face administrative and parental backlash or even legal action. Consequently, many great works of literature are ignored or not fully explored in the public high school classroom. An even greater consequence, however, is that high school students, formulating their individual value systems in relation to hundreds of varying cultural influences, are denied the ability to fully examine one of the most crucial elements of culture from a multicultural perspective in an academic setting. Thus, students are not encouraged to explore their own attitudes toward religion, nor are they aided in developing an awareness of theologies different from their own.

The public perception of the extent to which theology-based discussion is legally permitted in the classroom tends to differ from the actual legislation on the issue. The public understanding seems to be that any discussion of literature breaches a legal ban on religion in schools. However, the only legislation that has been passed concerning religion in schools deals with school-led prayer and Bible-reading. As Howard M. Miller recently commented in a column on cultural diversity in an academic education journal:

A prohibition on school-sanctioned prayer and Bible reading has become an all-out ban on anything at all to do with religion in connection with the curriculum—an elongated

moment of silence that has allowed ignorance to block the kind of understanding and mutual respect educators generally wish to promote. (316)

The silence that Miller mentions is unnecessary and unsubstantiated. Teachers should not be afraid of legal repercussions resulting from religious discussion in the classroom so long as both the students and teachers refrain from attempting conversion or forced acceptance and engage in conversation from a multicultural perspective concerned with sharing a variety of beliefs and clarifying misunderstandings.

Despite the fact that no legal ban exists on religious discussion from a multicultural perspective in the public school classroom, the classroom teacher would be wise to inform concerned parents and administrators of his awareness of the existing legislation concerning religion in the classroom and to enumerate his goals and objectives for engaging the class in religion-related discussion. Parents should be advised to read the text and carry the classroom discussion into their own conversations with their children. Administrators might be encouraged to observe the discussion and perceive the benefits of a multicultural discussion of religious issues in the classroom.

Pedagogical Cautions

Do not force acceptance. A successful interreligious dialogue and multicultural approach to Catholic-themed literature requires that students do not feel threatened while sharing their opinions. One way to ensure that students feel comfortable participating in such discussions is to stress the importance of respect and the difference between respecting and accepting the beliefs of others. Students should not feel forced to accept the attitudes towards Catholicism in the literature or the opinions of their teachers and peers. Teachers should make the distinction

between respect and acceptance before proceeding with the Catholic-themed literature and interreligious dialogue.

Another way teachers can create a more comfortable environment for religious discussion is by moving slowly toward integration. All students will not be open to religious differences, and as a result, many will resist any interreligious dialogue. Such students should not be forced to participate but gradually be encouraged to offer their opinions to add further elements to a diversity of understanding in the classroom. Will notes that “it is important not to force a consideration of the meaning of differences too early, or students will just continue to reject the reality of the other” (3). By looking at religious issues from a multicultural perspective, teachers and students can concentrate on other issues of multiculturalism in the text, bringing religious issues gradually into the discussion in relation to a variety of other related aspects of text and culture.

View opposition and defensiveness as stages, not obstacles. While some students will respect religious difference as the product of living in a diverse culture, some students will not be open to accepting differences. As long as defensive students are not disrespectful of the opinions of their peers, they should be permitted to tactfully offer disagreement. Student should, in fact, be encouraged to offer any disagreement they might have with the author’s viewpoints as expressed in the literature. Often a debate about the merits of a text’s themes can work to disguise interreligious dialogue as a discussion of the literature, helping students to feel more at ease about disagreeing with another’s opinion.

Will argues that “Defense and Minimization can be viewed positively, as developmental stages in the recognition of the cultural difference” (5). When students become defensive, they are actually indicating that they recognize that a difference exists, which teachers should accept

as a step above denial. Teachers should also realize that when students are made to defend their beliefs, they must first question them before developing an argument. Once students have posed questions in opposition to their beliefs, whether in dissent or defense of them, they will often ponder the answers to those questions in a variety of contexts long after leaving the classroom, thus opening opportunities for accepting and understanding differences. The pedagogical goal of interreligious dialogue is not to change students' worldviews but to make students more reflective (Will 19).

Discuss concepts, not realities. Will reminds educators to maintain that a religious issue “is a concept and not a reality that is being discussed” (15) when the interreligious dialogue occurs in the context of a classroom. Students, too, should be discouraged from making statements about the certainty of their beliefs and instead offer objective comments about their worldviews as a whole. For example, a Catholic student might avoid stating, “The bread and wine at Mass is the body and blood of Christ no matter what anyone else says,” and instead rephrase the comment so something like, “Roman Catholics believe that the communion at Mass becomes the body and blood of Christ.” Such phrasing gives the discussion a more academic and multicultural approach and helps prevent disagreement from becoming personal.

Do not simply minimize differences. Often when discussing religious differences, people will downplay areas that spark controversy in favor of concentrating on similarities to create a more amiable atmosphere. Will points out the benefits of “offer[ing] some similarities in order to move students away from a defensive posture” (16). Such a tactic may be useful if students become overly defensive and seem to forget that the purpose of interreligious dialogue is to concentrate on understanding differences. However, an over-reliance on similarities to maintain agreement in the classroom prevents students from understanding difference if no one

challenges their ways of thinking. Thus, while similarities create harmony among controversial topics of discussion, they should be used only in aid of understanding and not to avoid disagreement.

Avoid “Othering” the literature. While many students will be examining the Catholic-themed literature as evidence of a worldview different than their own, educators need to be cautious not to “Other” the literature. In other words, teachers must make sure they are not teaching Catholicism as something radically different or as distant from the students’ own worldviews but as a one perspective in an body of knowledge in which all perspectives are interrelated. Finding the balance between setting up the Catholic-themed literature as related yet still different from other worldviews is challenging, but it can be accomplished if teachers establish early in the instruction the context of all worldviews as part of a shared diversity. The subsequent interreligious discussion should then avoid the attitude of learning about something and maintain the objective of examining a multitude of related worldviews.

An interdisciplinary approach to religious studies is ideal. While including discussions of Catholic-themed literature in the language arts classroom provides an excellent vehicle for interreligious dialogue and an examination of religion from a multicultural perspective, an interdisciplinary approach to the subject is necessary for students to experience the full affect of this project. Language arts teachers are encouraged to work with educators in other disciplines to develop units that encompass a variety of perspectives on Catholic issues.

V. Conclusion

While this project specifically focuses on using interreligious dialogue to incorporate Catholic-themed literature into the secondary language arts classroom, the outlined research and

pedagogy suggest that religious beliefs and related worldviews of many cultures belong in the language arts classroom and should be incorporated in instruction that prompts students to examine and develop their personal religious worldviews. Lessons involving interreligious dialogue would certainly be strengthened by incorporating literature of other religious traditions into the curriculum. Guides for teaching works of Protestant Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and a plethora of other religious traditions would strengthen the multicultural appeal of interreligious dialogue and would lend even more opportunities for taking an interdisciplinary approach to religious-themed literature.

The content of this project would also benefit from extension, given the inexhaustible amount of Catholic-themed literature available, as evidenced by Reichardt's *An Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature*. While the purpose of the guides contained in this project is to provide exploratory models for looking at Catholic-themed literature, educators might also benefit from more detailed informative guides that delineate specific terminology and practices mentioned in the texts.

Whatever the resources that have and will become available for incorporating religious issues into secondary school curricula, and in spite of the religious affiliations of the author and text, an educator's encouragement of interreligious dialogue from a multicultural perspective should serve as an integral part of making students into aware and respectful individuals.

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Appendix A

Brideshead Revisited by Evelyn Waugh*Introduction*

Evelyn Waugh's modernist novel *Brideshead Revisited* will likely appeal to high school-level readers who are beginning to examine themselves against the ideals presented to them in their childhoods and facing the challenges of figuring out where the ideals of their upbringing fit in their developing worldviews. Unlike Stephen in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* whose personal conversion results in his falling from the Church of his childhood and unlike Levertov's narrator in *The Stone and the Sapphire* who chronicles her conversion toward the Church, Waugh's characters do not reach definitive results in their conversion experiences. Instead, Waugh depicts the challenges of forming a worldview that reconciles engrained childhood beliefs with a sense of personal direction and fulfillment. When the characters fall short of both their sense of duty to church and to self, Waugh finds opportunities to examine the gray area of concepts such as doubt and faith, sin and righteousness, and resistance and conversion. Like many students at the high school level, Waugh's characters wrestle with uncertainties in forming and acting on their worldviews.

The novel's prose may present some challenges for reading, depending on the students' familiarity with British lexicon and Catholic motifs, but those difficulties can be overcome by building background knowledge with appropriate introductory information and pre-reading strategies that address historical context, vocabulary, and Catholic practices. A more pressing challenge, however, involves making the specifically Catholic religious concerns of the characters adaptable to the experiences of non-Catholic and especially non-Christian students. Drawing connections among larger issues such as adherence to belief systems and the

psychology of faith will demand interreligious dialogue among particularly intuitive students who succeed in focusing on personal examples analogous to the literature.

Terminology

Rosary
Sacred Heart
Confession
Saints
St. Anthony of Padua
Jesuit
Mass
Maundy Thursday
Easter
Monastery
Newman
Annulment
Tabernacle
Chrism
Sign of the cross
Tabernacle Lamp (or “small red flame”)

Discussion

Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* resembles many other works of Catholic-themed literature in its deconstruction of the opposition between religious devotion and worldly interests and in its portrait of imperfect believers experiencing a conversion that either leads them closer to or farther away from devotion to a belief system. Essentially, Waugh’s novel examines what it means to be a Catholic.

Charles, who has no religious affiliations of his own at the start of his studies at Oxford, often reacts with bewilderment at the Marchmain’s Catholic convictions or lack thereof, especially when considering the carefree nature of his comrade, Sebastian. Charles, acting as narrator, reminds the reader that “almost daily, since I had known Sebastian, some chance word in his conversation had reminded me that he was a Catholic, but I took it as a foible, like his teddy-bear” (75). Charles perceives Sebastian’s Catholic roots as a rejected family tradition until

Sebastian laments the difficulties of being Catholic. Charles then expresses his supposition that Sebastian was indifferent to his religion, to which Sebastian responds that despite the vice in his lifestyle, he considers his religion to be “sensible” and “a lovely idea.” Charles responds, “If you can believe all that and you don’t want to be good, where’s the difficulty about your religion?” (76).

Through the theological conversations between Charles and the members of the Marchmain family, Waugh develops characters that harbor respect for their Catholic faith but consistently fail to meet the moral obligations of living that faith. Yet Waugh’s characters concern themselves as much with personal happiness, and Waugh suggests that no correlation exists between compliance to Catholic doctrine and personal happiness. Sebastian illustrates this concept when he outlines the religious devotion and personal happiness of each member of his family:

You see we’re a mixed family religiously. Brideshead and Cordelia are both fervent Catholics; he’s miserable, she’s bird-happy; Julia and I are half-heathen; I am happy, I rather think Julia isn’t; mummy is popularly believed to be a saint and papa is excommunicated – and I wouldn’t know which of them was happy. Anyway, however you look at it, happiness doesn’t seem to have much to do with it, and that’s all I want. (78)

Sebastian continues to describe Catholics as individuals with “an entirely different outlook on life; everything they think important is different from other people” (78). Thus, Sebastian seems to depict Catholic teachings at odds with modernist social concerns of individual satisfaction; and yet, each time Waugh seems to establish some correlation between devotion and happiness, he presents a character who defies the correlation, as in the case of Cordelia, who Sebastian

describes as a “fervent Catholic” and as “bird-happy.” However, Sebastian defines himself and his other sister, Julia, as “half-heathen,” caught in-between an awareness of their religious upbringing and the worldly influences apparently in opposition to their religion.

Charles, however, does draw a correlation between religious adherence and personal happiness, albeit a negative one. He confesses to Brideshead, “It seems to me that without your religion Sebastian would have the chance to be a happy and healthy man” (130). Thus, while Sebastian establishes that religious devotion does not guarantee personal happiness, Charles claims that the pressing concerns of ingrained religious awareness pose a threat to an individual’s ability to achieve personal happiness.

Surprisingly, Waugh’s voice seems prominent in Sebastian rather than Charles. Sebastian, even in his apparent downfall at the end of the novel, remains consistent in his attitudes toward religion throughout the novel; that is, he is in awe and fear of it while never fully able to abandon his worldly pleasures to be devoted to it. Charles’ character demands that he determine a solution to his inner turmoil, and his allegiances with respect to religion undergo a conversion in the story; thus, Charles is an inconsistent character in his denotation of change. Charles’ conversion garners its rhetorical impact from Sebastian’s constant interior conflict between the faith which he knows he should meet with devotion and the desire for worldly satisfactions that often trumps his religious influences. Thus, Sebastian is freed from determinacy by conflict while Charles is limited by decision.

Sebastian’s entrustment to a monastery at the end of the novel seems the eventual result of his inner conflict between religious devotion and worldly influences, and it seems only the foil of his situation at the beginning of the novel: where once his religious background conflicted with the lifestyle of residing at Oxford, his worldly desires prevent him from fully entering into

monastic life. Cordelia describes his situation as one of “a few hangers-on in a religious house, you know; people who can’t quite fit in either to the world or the monastic rule” (278). Waugh does not present Sebastian as a negative representation of a Catholic life, however. Instead, *Brideshead Revisited* serves as an acknowledgement that religious devotion and worldly influences are parts of a natural conflict that characterize a person of faith. Cordelia, perhaps the most devoted Catholic of the family, even acknowledges the legitimacy of a life which refuses to abandon either religious or worldly influences when she speaks of Sebastian’s likely death:

He’ll develop little eccentricities of devotion, intense personal cults of his own; he’ll be found in the chapel at odd times and missed when he’s expected. Then one morning, after one of his drinking bouts, he’ll be picked up at the gate dying, and show by a mere flicker of the eyelid that he is conscious when they give him the last sacraments. It’s not such a bad way of getting through one’s life. (279)

For Cordelia, and perhaps for Waugh, it is the presence of faith that indicates a worthy life; the surrender to faith does not mean abandoning worldly desires but sacrificing some of the personal happiness of fulfilling those desires because of the guilt that faith inspires.

Like Sebastian, Julia experiences the conflict between religious devotion and worldly endeavors; for Julia, the conflict takes the form of questioning adherence to Catholic doctrine when her proposed marriage conflicts with church teachings on adultery. Despite her best intentions in marrying Rex, a divorced non-believer, her Catholic upbringing “stood as a barrier between her and her natural goal” (165). Because of her Catholic upbringing, she conceives of mortal consequences of rejecting church teaching in favor of personal interests, that “if she apostatized now, having been brought up in the Church, she would go to hell” (165). Waugh does not initially depict Julia as a Catholic too devout to defy the teaching of her Church, but as

an individual whose capacity for personal reasoning is challenged by ghosts of a religion that had been more prominent in her past than in her present. However, when Charles confronts her with a scientific explanation that might provide a solution to her dilemma, calling her concerns “a preconditioning from childhood; feelings of guilt from the nonsense you were taught in the nursery,” her disagreement with his explanation suggests that her religious devotions may not be as distant as she initially admitted (262).

Julia ultimately chooses her marriage over adherence to Church teaching, but she later regrets her decision and becomes more conflicted with her grief over “living in sin” (259). She acknowledges that she has been continually plagued by her awareness of Catholic doctrine and the consequences of choosing personal morality over the moral teachings of the Church:

I’ve been punished a little for marrying Rex. You see, I can’t get all that sort of thing out of my mind, quite – Death, Judgement [sic], Heaven, Hell, Nanny Hawkins, and the catechism. It becomes part of oneself, if they give it one early enough. (234)

Julia does not view faith as a result of childhood conditioning but as a real and present influence that “becomes part of oneself.” Although she does not use the term, nor does Waugh, Julia describes grace—faith as a gift from God, an awareness of religious truths that comes from a source within us that is immediately part of us and separate at the same time. While Julia views a Catholic upbringing as something she can give to her child—“That’s one thing I can give her. It doesn’t seem to have done me much good, but my child shall have it” (233)—her denial of the scientific explanation for faith and her awareness of the constant internal conflict within herself suggest that faith as a continual and unceasing influential force throughout life is not something given on human terms but instead is divinely bestowed.

Julia's internal conflict between religious devotion and personal interests ultimately serves as the final factor that influences Charles' conversion. Upon seeing the intense personal conflict over whether to call a priest to her father's deathbed, Charles confesses that he "suddenly felt the longing for a sign, if only for courtesy, if only for the sake of the woman I loved" (306). His desire for a divine intervention to relieve some of Julia's conflict inspires him to pray for a sign. When Charles' prayer is granted and Lord Marchmain makes the sign of the cross before his death, Charles suddenly realizes the magnitude of the supernatural interaction he witnessed:

Then I knew that the sign I had asked for was not a little thing, not a passing nod of recognition, and a phrase came back to me from my childhood of the veil of the temple being rent from top to bottom. (306)

Like Sebastian and Julia, Charles reaches into his childhood and finds an image of faith that had not been ingrained in his mind when he was an impressionable youth but that had been given to him near his first awareness of consciousness so that it might serve as an influential remnant of faith throughout his life.

Charles' spiritual awakening looms over the entire novel because of the religious conflicts between him and the Marchmains and the frequent evidence of foreshadowing in Charles' narrative that pervades much of the novel. Charles reveals early in the novel that he remembers nothing of the texts from his classes at Oxford, but that "the other, more ancient lore which I acquired that term will be with me in one shape or another to my last hour" (39). He does not provide a contextual explanation of the "more ancient lore" to which he refers, but perhaps the lore he refers to is evident of the magnitude of the religious and spiritual influences that he acquired from his time at Brideshead.

Charles also foreshadows his eventual conversion in a series of metaphors early in the novel. He first compares his young adulthood to the process of fermenting wine:

All the wickedness of that time was like the spirit they mix with the pure grape of the Douro, heady stuff full of dark ingredients; it at once enriched and retarded the whole process of adolescence as the spirit checks the fermentation of the wine, renders it undrinkable, so that it must lie in the dark, year in, year out, until it is brought up at last fit for the table. (39)

Thus, Charles views his apathy for religion, his relationship with Sebastian, and the self-indulgence of his years at Oxford as necessary “wickedness” with which he could fuse the religious influences of Sebastian and his family and without which he would not have cause for conversion. Charles’ use of the metaphor of fermenting wine also acknowledges that religious and worldly influences cannot exist without each other, which again gives credence to a reading of Sebastian as a model of faith and of Waugh’s defense of imperfect believers.

Charles also compares himself to his mother. He recalls that his mother was a devout Christian, and he reflects on her death on a mission trip in Bosnia:

It once seemed odd to me that she should have thought it her duty to leave my father and me and go off with an ambulance, to Serbia, to die of exhaustion in the snow in Bosnia. But later I recognized one such spirit in myself. Later, too, I have come to accept claims which then, in 1923, I never troubled to examine, and to accept the supernatural as the real. I was aware of no such needs that summer at Brideshead. (75)

Unlike Sebastian’s embodiment of the conflict between religious devotion and living for worldly desires, Charles’ conversion is more of a spiritual awakening than a conflict since he initially

defines himself as atheist who through the influence of conflicted individuals and a series of tragic events, develops a reliance on faith in the supernatural.

That is not to say that Charles' religious devotion is without conflict. As Waugh's novel defines persons of faith as imperfect believers because faith naturally conflicts with worldly existence, so Charles experiences a conflict resulting from faith which is evident in his depiction of memory as a metaphor for faith. Upon revisiting Brideshead when the army overtakes it, Charles' reveals his fear of the memories it harbors: "I had reflected then that, whatever scenes of desolation lay ahead of us, I never feared one more brutal than this, and I reflected now that it had no single happy memory for me" (3). Charles repeatedly reflects on faith as a nostalgic remnant of his youth spent at Brideshead. The mansion itself often represents religion in Charles' memoirs. Brideshead remains a constant influence on Charles' development into adulthood and is depicted as analogous to the influence of faith: as faith consistently plagued Sebastian's lifestyle, so Brideshead acted as a constant influence on Charles:

As I drove away and turned back in the car to take what promised to be my last view of the house, I felt that I was leaving part of myself behind, and that wherever I went afterwards I should feel the lack of it, and search for it hopelessly, as ghosts are said to do, frequenting the spots where they buried material treasures without which they cannot pay their way to the nether world. (153)

The language Charles uses to describe his constant search for Brideshead reminds of Sebastian's, and likely Charles', constant religious awareness. Similarly, Charles ends his memoirs and the novel by musing on a metaphor of building Brideshead compared to conversion to a life of faith:

The builders did not know the uses to which their work would descend; they made a new house with the stones of the old castle; year by year, generation after generation, they

enriched and extended it; year by year the great harvest of timber in the park grew to ripeness....Something quite remote from anything the builders intended, has come out of their work, and out of the fierce little human tragedy in which I played; something none of us thought about at the time; a small red flame...the flame which the old knights saw from their tombs, which they saw put out; that flame burns again for other soldiers, far from home, farther, in heart, than Acre or Jerusalem. It could not have been lit but for the builders and the tragedians, and there I found it this morning, burning anew among the old stones. (315)

Like the builders who constructed Brideshead were not aware of the lives and events that would take place there, so too the Marchmains could not have been aware of the influence their religious conflicts had on Charles' religious conversion to spiritual awareness. Charles credits the "small red flame," the tabernacle flame that Charles uses as a symbol of faith, for sustaining the tragic worldly existence of imperfect believers and at the same time, credits those imperfect believers for keeping faith alive by enduring the tragedies it creates.

Methods

- *Research the psychology of faith* In *Brideshead Revisited*, Charles attempts to explain the nature of Julia's religious beliefs from a scientific perspective: "Of course it's a thing psychologists could explain; a preconditioning from childhood; feelings of guilt from the nonsense you were taught in the nursery. You do know at heart that it's all bosh, don't you?" Julia disagrees, though, responding, "How I wish it was!" A large amount of research has been published and studies performed relating to the psychology of faith—why people often cannot willingly move past beliefs introduced to them in childhood. Students might read a text such as *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development* by James W. Fowler or

peruse psychology journals for publications relating to the psychology of faith and faith formation. Whether or not students explore the research, they should be encouraged to discuss the origins of faith—whether faith results from a person’s upbringing, personal existential investigations and discoveries, divine grace and intervention, or other means of discovery.

- *Character Dictionaries* *Brideshead Revisited* depicts intimate moments in the lives of a family of Catholics who all lead different lifestyles and hold varying philosophies with regard to their perceptions of Catholic faith. A reading of the novel is hardly complete without thorough examination of the inner motivations and devotions of the characters Sebastian, Charles, Julia, Cordelia, Brideshead, Lady Marchmain, and Lord Marchmain. Students could analyze the motivations of these characters in a creative way by composing character dictionaries. Students could design a faith dictionary for each character and then find quotations from the characters in the text and write comments in the characters’ voices for a variety of terms related to the religious discussions in the novel. Words students could use include devotion, faith, marriage, annulment, priest, church, Catholic (as a noun), and sin.
- *Character Dialogues* Similar to the character dictionaries above, character dialogues would provide students with an opportunity to explore the religious philosophies and behavior motivations of the major characters in *Brideshead Revisited*. Students could extend the religious discussions featured in the novel by writing fictional discussions between two or three characters that cover an issue derived from or related to the religious issues discussed in the text. Students might compose character dialogues on issues such as homosexuality, the infallibility of Church teachings, the importance of raising children in the Church, judgment

and the consequences of sin in the afterlife, drinking, abortion, and interreligious marriages. Students might also be encouraged to write themselves into the character dialogues to give them the opportunity to share their own opinions on the issues of discussion.

- *View BBC Mini-Series* In 1981, *Brideshead Revisited* was adapted into a British mini-series featuring Jeremy Irons and Anthony Andrews. The series consisted of ten, one-hour episodes that were faithful to Waugh's characters and followed the novel's plot almost precisely. While teachers may not wish to show the entire mini-series because of its length, they should consider using segments or a few episodes to familiarize students with the tone that the locations add to the story. The second episode contains excellent footage of Oxford and the Brideshead mansion while capturing some of the important religious conversations between Charles and the Marchmains. A number of projects and writing assignments could stem from a viewing of the film as well.

Discussion Questions

1. When Charles observes that Catholics seem "just like other people," Sebastian responds, "That's exactly what they're not....They've got an entirely different outlook on life." What are some examples of ways that Waugh distinguishes the Catholic characters in the novel to highlight their different outlooks on life? How do Sebastian's and Waugh's portrayals of Catholics establish the religion in relation to theories of multiculturalism? In other words, how do Sebastian's and Waugh's treatments of difference affect the reader's perspective of Catholicism within the context of other religious traditions?
2. What is the nature and extent of Charles and Sebastian's friendship in the first part of the novel? Find several passages in which Charles reflects on the role and meaning of Sebastian in his life. What threads (terminology, imagery) connect these passages? Lady Marchmain

reveals her concern at Sebastian having only one close friend. What evidence in the text suggest possible reasons for her concern?

3. When Charles leaves Brideshead for the last time before returning several years later as a soldier, he says, "I have left behind illusion....Henceforth I live in a world of three dimensions." What does he mean by illusion? By a world of three dimensions? How does this metaphor reflect Charles' perspective on the Marchmain's Catholic religious beliefs at this point in the novel? How does it foreshadow a change in Charles? How does the imagery relate to Waugh's overall comment on the nature of faith in *Brideshead Revisited*?
4. Considering the strict Catholic upbringing of the Marchmain children and the resulting struggles between religious beliefs and lifestyle decisions, what does *Brideshead Revisited* seem to be saying about how to address religion while raising children? Is the struggle faced by the Marchmain children an unfortunate result of engrained Catholic doctrine or the necessary challenges of living a life of faith? What does Julia's decision about raising her children Catholic add to the debate?
5. How would Waugh define what it means to be a believer of a certain faith? A member of an organized religion? When Charles asks Sebastian how he can believe the traditional stories of his religion, Sebastian claims he believes them because they are "a lovely idea." When Charles criticizes Sebastian's answer, Sebastian responds, "That's how I believe." How does Sebastian's proposed basis for faith fit with Waugh's perspective on what it means to be a believer and on the role of faith in an individual's lifestyle?
6. Near the end of the novel, Charles, who had previously maintained a refusal to acknowledge a personal belief system, prays sincerely for the forgiveness of Lord Marchmain's sins and for a sign from God that would comfort Julia. Charles' prayer, however, follows a series of

criticisms of Julia's insistence on providing a priest at her father's bedside. How did you respond to the juxtaposition of Charles' two different behaviors? Should a reader interpret Charles' prayer as a religious conversion? Why or why not? If so, what further evidence does the novel provide for this reading? If not, what explanation does Waugh provide for Charles' moment of prayer?

Bibliographic Information

Waugh, Evelyn. *Brideshead Revisited*. New York: Knopf, 1993.

Appendix B

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man by James Joyce

Introduction

James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* chronicles the early life and education of Stephen Dedalus as he struggles with his Catholic faith and Irish heritage. The novel may at first seem an unlikely addition to a collection of Catholic literature because of its unfavorable attitude toward the Catholic faith. However, Joyce addresses several issues that young students often experience in relation to their religious beliefs, and readers can learn as much about their personal beliefs by reading about the fall from faith as by examining conversion to a religion. The novel will be a challenging read for most high school students, but the content and themes will likely be more accessible to young adult readers than those in many other novels taught at the secondary level. Thus, while educators may have to clarify plot more often than usual, the study of *Portrait of the Artist* should concentrate on how students handle similar themes in their personal lives compared to the central characters in the novel.

Terminology

Incense, Censer, Altar
 Monstrance
 First communion
 Order; Jesuits
 Holy water
 Eucharist, Consecration
 Saints, Intercession
 Adam & Eve, Fall of Man, Lucifer
 Virgin Mary
 Sacrament of Confession
 Purgatory
 Rosary
 Gifts of the Spirit
 Holy Trinity
 Temptation
 Priests

Sacrament of Holy Orders
 Protestantism
 Limbo; Hell

Discussion

When reading *Portrait of the Artist* from a Catholic perspective, two issues are of interest: the stages and influences of Stephen's fall from the Church and Joyce's critique of Catholicism. The two themes coincide since Joyce set the story in a third-person narrative in which the author's point of view is of limited omniscience to Stephen; thus, Stephen's critiques of the Church generally reflect the motif of religious doubt in the text and the speaker's critique of the Church.

Joyce introduces Stephen as an intuitive child who ponders the meaning of God and the universe:

It was very big to think about everything and everywhere. Only God could do that. He tried to think what a big thought that must be but he could think only of God....It made him very tired to think that way. (12)

Throughout the novel, but especially in his youth and early education, Stephen is plagued by the desire for knowledge, and a belief in the omnipotence of God does not suffice as an answer to his questions. When he thinks about politics and the universe, his awareness of his own lack of knowledge leaves him feeling "small and weak" (12). Joyce portrays Stephen in contrast with his peers by observing Stephen's disapproval of his classmates' pranks and satisfaction with limited answers:

All the boys seemed to him very strange. They had all fathers and mothers and different clothes and voices. He longed to be at home and lay his head on his mother's lap. But he

could not and so he longed for the play and study and prayers to be over and to be in bed.

(8)

Joyce portrays Stephen as an inquisitive child who feels powerless in the face of his own ignorance and the unjust actions of his peers, thus establishing a character whose inquisitive mind makes him superior to supernatural answers to life's great questions. Thus, Joyce creates a highly intelligent and intuitive character that he seems to suggest is incapable of faith, thus critiquing religious belief systems as non-intellectual.

Stephen's adult influences do not serve as models of the power of faith to sustain a lifetime of questions. In fact, the adults in Stephen's life inspire more existential questions. At home he is witness to his family's heated theological debates in which his father questions the authority of the Church and its clergy in relation to political matters. And while Dante speaks in favor of the Church's teachings, she recognizes the influence that Stephen's father's criticism of the Church will have on Stephen's attitudes toward religion: "He'll remember all this when he grows up, said Dante hotly—the language he heard against God and religion and priests in his own home" (32). Furthermore, the religious figures in Stephen's life do not act as positive influences of faith for Stephen. In fact, their actions provoke Stephen to adopt his father's religious criticisms. When Stephen is forced to kneel in front of his class as punishment for an act he did not commit, he recognizes the imperfection of his priest, Father Arnall:

It was cruel and unfair to make him kneel in the middle of the class then: and Father Arnall had told them both that they might return to their places without making any difference between them. He had listened to Father Arnall's low and gentle voice as he corrected the themes. Perhaps he was sorry now and wanted to be decent. But it was unfair and cruel. The prefect of studies was a priest but that was cruel and unfair. (53)

Father Arnall's example reveals a personal hypocrisy which Stephen internalizes as a general hypocrisy of faith: because a priest's actions did not coincide with the religion he preached, Stephen discounts the power of faith as a stabilizer of behavior. Thus, in addition to Stephen's perception of faith as incapable of satisfying his intellectual curiosity, religious faith fails to coincide with Stephen's conceptualization of justice.

Consequently, by the time Stephen begins to experience desires for sexual fulfillment, the Church has failed him to the point that he does not consider his religious influences before acting on his impulses. In fact, at times he willfully acts in opposition to Church teachings on sexual activity as if he is using sexual exploitation as a means of rejection:

He turned to appease the fierce longings of his heart before which everything else was idle and alien. He cared little that he was in mortal sin, that his life had grown to be a tissue of subterfuge and falsehood. Beside the savage desire within him to realize the enormities which he brooded on nothing was sacred. He bore cynically with the shameful details of his secret riots in which he exulted to defile with patience whatever image had attracted his eyes. (106)

Ultimately, an ingrained fear of the threat of hell persuades Stephen to return to the Church. The key to recognizing where his religion fails him is in the awareness that Stephen does not pursue his religion out of love of God or faith in the supernatural, but fear of eternal damnation, as evidenced by his rejection of "spiritual exaltation" in favor of the feelings of "mortification" he believes to be necessary to escape eternal punishment:

He had been forewarned of the dangers of spiritual exaltation and did not allow himself to desist from even the least or lowliest devotion, striving also by constant mortification to undo the sinful past rather than to achieve a saintliness fraught with peril. (165)

While Stephen returns to the Church after pursuing a life of hedonism, the Church fails Stephen again by using fear as a motivator and by reinforcing guilt and shame that do not enable a person to find happiness. Stephen internalizes the sermons he hears and the apologetics he reads that reiterate that atonement is derived solely from self-depreciation. Thus, Stephen lives with the belief that “his pride in his own sin, his loveless awe of God, told him that his offence was too grievous to be atoned for in whole or in part by a false homage to the Allseeing and Allknowing” (112). Fear and guilt often work as motivators only temporarily and ultimately result in fatalism, as Stephen eventually realizes. Stephen rejects the Church again once he begins to feel powerless in the admonishment of his own sin:

The snares of the world were its ways of sin. He would fall. He had not yet fallen but he would fall silently, in an instant. Not to fall was too hard, too hard: and he felt the silent lapse of his soul, as it would be at some instant to come, falling, falling, but not yet fallen, still unfallen, but about to fall. (178)

However, the novel does not end with the certainty of Stephen’s rejection of religion. Joyce provides several suggestions that religion and faith, once reinforced in a person’s life, remain present in the thoughts of an individual and continue to effect a person’s existential viewpoints. Stephen’s discussions with Cranly at the end of the novel suggest that Stephen’s religion still influences him. Cranly notes during their theological debate: “It is a curious thing, do you know...how your mind is supersaturated with the religion in which you say you disbelieve” (266). And Cranly later prompts Stephen to admit that he still recognizes the power of the Eucharist:

--And is that why you will not communicate, Cranly asked, because you are not sure of that too, because you feel that the host, too, may be the body and blood of the son of God and not a wafer of bread? And because you fear that I may be?

--Yes, Stephen said quietly, I feel that and I also fear it. (270)

Stephen even admits that he still recognizes a capability of following God's will within himself:

I tried to love God, he said at length. It seems not I failed. It is very difficult. I tried to unite my will with the will of God instant by instant. In that I did not always fail. I could perhaps do that still. (267)

Thus, while Stephen outright rejects his Church in favor of what he views as an unconstrained expression, he has not lost awareness of the religion of his family and his childhood. Perhaps Joyce's novel is not so much a rejection of religion but a criticism of the Church's methods of influencing faith with fear of punishment and a critique of some of the Church's fatalistic dogmas. Joyce clearly recognizes, through the words of Cranly, that the Church consists of people with imperfect faith:

You need not look upon yourself as driven away if you do not wish to go or as a heretic or an outlaw. There are many good believers who think as you do. Would that surprise you? The church is not the stone building nor even the clergy and their dogmas. It is the whole mass of those born into it. (272)

Portrait of the Artist, then, is not solely a warning of the limitations of indoctrination, but also a cautionary note to the Church and its clergy that young Catholics need positive religious influences and that fear acts as a motivator contrary to faith.

Methods

- *Mock Trial for Stephen* At the end of the novel, Joyce presents the idea that the Church is made of up many people who struggle with faith. As Cranley says to Stephen, “The church is not the stone building nor even the clergy and their dogmas. It is the whole mass of those born into it” (272). This concept will likely spark some controversy among students and should provide an opportunity for a lengthy discussion. Students might also discuss the concept of excommunication from the Church and stage a mock trial for Stephen. The students should research the Church’s doctrine about excommunication, perhaps using *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* as a reference. For evidence, the students should cite their research and passages from the text in prosecution or defense of Stephen. The point of this exercise is not to win a favorable verdict (in fact, no verdict necessarily need be determined) but to prompt students to think about what it means to be a member of a faith community and how doubt and dissent affect a person’s religious affiliation.
- *Mock Trial for Stephen’s Influences* A mock trial for Stephen’s influences would be similar to the exercise above, but in this case, students would have to examine the text to identify characters who influenced Stephen’s faith, both positively and negatively. Again, students should cite examples from the text to prosecute or defend a given character. As with the trial for Stephen, a favorable verdict is not the aim of the activity, but rather, the objective is to prompt students to consider the importance of religious influences and how a person can best serve as a role model. Students might also examine whether a person of a certain faith has any requirement to act as a religious role model. Staging a mock trial provides students with an opportunity to act out various roles and to voice their opinions in a context that, because it has the atmosphere of play, might make controversy seem less threatening.

- Research** When examining religion as a multicultural issue, students often find that religion is embedded in a culture and relates to many other aspects of that culture. In the case of *Portrait of the Artist*, Joyce presents Catholicism as an Irish faith that contrasts the Protestant ethic of English culture. When Stephen rejects the Church at the end of the novel, he does so in relation to Ireland as well: “I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church” (274). The role of Catholicism in Irish life provides an excellent subject for students to research. Students might be encouraged to give oral presentations about the role of Catholicism in Irish life before finishing the novel so that their reading of the final chapter of the novel will be affected by their familiarity with many of the issues that Stephen and his friends discuss. Such research might also spawn examinations of the role of religion in American culture and how the Catholicism of Joyce’s novel can be compared to religious issues in the United States today.
- Artistic Expression of Faith** At the end of *Portrait of the Artist*, Stephen makes a statement of his purpose in life in which he contrasts religion with artistic expression. Throughout the novel, Joyce often suggests that faith in the supernatural often hinders the intellect of the artist. Students should have many thoughts to bring to a discussion on religion and artistic expression, during which students might consider how religion has inspired many of the Catholic-themed works discussed in this project. Students might also be encouraged to generate an artistic expression of their own beliefs, perhaps in an attempt to prove that religion can be a tool that inspires art, though such an aim should not be the goal of this activity since some students may tend to agree with Joyce. Students may write a piece of religious literature, create a piece of art inspired by their faith, or compose music or dance that expresses their beliefs. This activity provides students with an opportunity translate the

class discussion into another form of expression and also serves as evidence that a person's witness to his/her faith does not always have to be expressed verbally.

Discussion Questions

1. Consider the argument between Mr. Dedalus and Dante in Chapter 1. What are their points? Whose argument do you agree with? What is the value of strict obedience? Of dissent? How much dissent is acceptable before it is considered rejection?
2. Consider the punishment Stephen receives in Chapter 1. Is the punishment unjust? Why or why not? How did it deter Stephen from his faith? In what ways is the current public school system similar to Stephen's school? Have you or other students ever been deterred from personal ideals?
3. Consider the sermon in Chapter 3. What does the priest hope to accomplish with his invocation of the fear of God and the threat of hellfire? What might be some positive and negative aspects to such a sermon? Is it possible for threats to inspire faith? What was Stephen's immediate reaction to the sermon? How did the sermon and its messages ultimately inspire Stephen's fall from faith?
4. Can intellect and faith co-exist? Is one the antithesis of the other or are they related in a different, perhaps more complex way? Can a scholar and intellectual hold beliefs in the supernatural? Can a person believe in science and in God? What about religion and art? Can quality art stem from faith?
5. In Joyce's novel, how does the Church drive people away? Is it possible for the actions that drove Stephen away from his faith to draw other people toward it? In what ways are people driven away from membership in your religion and other religions? Should a religion be

more accommodating to individuals with contrary beliefs in order to avoid driving away its members?

6. What doubts do you have with regard to faith or religious convictions? How do you address your doubts? How do those doubts compare to Stephen's doubts? Is doubt an indication of weak faith?

Bibliographic Information

Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. New York: Time, 1964.

Appendix C

The Stream and the Sapphire by Denise Levertov

Introduction

The Stream and the Sapphire is Denise Levertov's collection of poems that chronicle her conversion to Catholicism. In the introduction to the collection, Levertov states that her poems "trace my own slow movement from agnosticism to Christian faith, a movement incorporating much of doubt and questioning as well as of affirmation" (vii). Many of the poems discuss the theme of religious doubt and conversion, while others provide examples of Catholic imagery and the significance of symbols. Levertov's poems also include frequent references to religious figures in the Bible and in Church history. The prominent themes, terms, and figures in the work provide numerous opportunities for discussion, research, and projects based on Levertov's poems.

Terminology

Incarnation
 Sanctuary
 Ascension
 Purgatory
 Limbo
 Annunciation
 Saint Peter
 Cademon
 Lady Julian of Norwich
 Brother Lawrence
 Parable of the Mustard Seed
 St. Thomas Didymus (Doubting Thomas)

Discussion

Denise Levertov's conversion from religious doubt to Catholic faith is the prominent theme in the collection. In "Human Being," the first poem of the collection, Levertov discusses the conflict between the rational mind and spiritual awe:

Always the mind
 walking, working, stopping sometimes to kneel
 in awe of beauty, sometimes leaping, filled with the energy
 of delight, but never able to pass the wall. (l. 10-14)

Levertov often characterizes the challenges of faith as a two-sided conflict in which both sides are often present, constantly pulling against each other.

Images of moving water appear in several of the poems to depict the speaker's conflict between doubt and faith. In "Human Being" Levertov describes "murmuring currents of doubt and praise" (l. 40) and in "The Tide" she states that "faith's a tide, it seems, ebbs and flows responsive / to action and inaction" (l. 27-28). Thus, doubt and faith do not exist independent of each other but as related feelings experienced at different times in different ways in a single person, much like the warm and cold temperatures of the currents in a body of water.

In "Poetics of Faith" Levertov presents the image of stones in the water as "context" for dealing with the conflict of doubt and faith:

'Straight to the point'
 can ricochet,
 unconvincing.
 Circumlocution, analogy,
 parable's ambiguities, provide
 context, stepping-stones. (l. 1-6)

With this passage, Levertov seems to be making two comments about the study of religion and its relation to internal conflict. The first point is that reflection and study of the "ambiguities" of religion works to settle the conflict between doubt and faith. Levertov also seems to provide a

reason for the ambiguity of religion. The first three lines of the passage claim that, while a direct and blatant delineation of religious truth might seem to provide an undeniable justification of faith, “straight to the point” often fails to convince. Levertov argues that the “stepping-stones” of faith result from the individual’s derivation of meaning from ambiguous details, making faith more personal and thus, stronger.

However, Levertov’s poems do not view conversion as an end to doubt. Religious adherence presents an equal challenge to the speaker in many of the poems. In “On a Theme by Thomas Merton” the speaker compares Adam’s distraction from God in Genesis to the attentions of a child at a theme park. Levertov seems to view distraction as a similar challenge to faith as doubt. In “Flickering Mind” the speaker likens God to a stream and struggles to focus on the sapphire in the water:

You are the stream, the fish, the light,
the pulsing shadow,
you the unchanging presence, in whom all
moves and changes.

How can I focus my flickering, perceive
at the fountain’s heart

the sapphire I know is there? (l. 25-31)

Here, the images of water and stone work as vehicles for different tenors than in the aforementioned poems. While the speaker still seeks a stone as the solution to distraction, she now recognizes God as a stream, a “presence, in whom all / moves and changes.” Even though the speaker is now converted and recognizes the existence of God, she still struggles to fully concentrate on her faith enough to live by it.

Despite the conversion experiences described in Levertov's poems, she still seems to realize that a perfect adherence to faith is impossible given that humans remain subject to the laws of mortality. In "On the Belief in the Physical Resurrection of Jesus" the speaker examines the concept of miracles as a reflection of people's failures to view the world wholly by faith:

Miracles (ultimate need, bread
of life) are miracles just because
people so tuned
to the humdrum laws:
gravity, mortality—
can't open
to symbol's power
unless convinced of its ground,
its roots
in bone and blood. (l. 27-36)

Thus, Levertov's book of conversion poems ultimately becomes about not a single individual's momentary conversion to Christian faith but rather about human life as a conversion, a life-long challenge to live a life of faith and to view the world with the eyes of a believer.

Methods

- *Poem Re-arrangement* *The Stream and the Sapphire* is actually comprised of a set of poems drawn from Levertov's other collections of poetry. The author arranged the poems in a way which demonstrated a progression of conversion. Students should recognize patterns in the collection, many of which may reflect their own feelings about faith and doubt. As a class, students may discuss themes and trends that occur in the poems and also determine the

organizational strategies Levertov used in compiling the poems. The concept of poem re-arrangement could work in several ways. One way involves having students determine Levertov's organizational strategy and then choose five poems that could best reflect Levertov's progression of conversion. Another method for poem re-arrangement involves having students select and arranging poems from the collection that reflect their own feelings about doubt and faith. In any case, students should be required to justify their poem selections and articulate, through verbal or written means, how their choices fulfill the assignment.

- **Research** Many of Levertov's poems contain references to terms, stories, or people that stem from the Catholic tradition. Several of these items are included in the *Terminology* list above. Students will likely be unfamiliar with many of the items, and instead of simply defining the terms or telling the stories to the students, teachers could assign specific poems and provide an opportunity for students to consult resources in which they might research the items. The focus of this assignment should not only be to define the terms, but also to explain how the terms apply to the entire poem.
- **Write a Conversion Poem** Since the main theme of *The Stream and the Sapphire* centers on religious conversion, students should reflect on their own spiritual lives or, if possible, their religious conversions. How did they get the beliefs they have? How have their beliefs changed? How are their beliefs different from their parents' and peers' beliefs? One way for students to reflect on and express their personal spiritual lives or religious conversions is through writing poetry about their experiences. Students should use Levertov's poems as examples and inspiration.

- *Convert a Poem into a Personal Narrative* Some students may not want to share their personal conversion experiences, and educators should respect students' rights to privacy. One way that students can still reflect on the significance of conversion is by understanding the reasons for another person's conversion. After discussing Levertov's conversion as witnessed in *The Stream and the Sapphire*, students may select one or several of Levertov's poems, reflect on the experiences and feelings of the speaker of the poem, and apply those experiences and feelings to a personal narrative of the speaker in the poem.

Discussion Questions

1. Levertov claims that the collection of poems reflects her "slow movement from agnosticism to Christian faith" (vii) but she also informs the reader that the poems are not featured in the order in which she wrote them. How can her movement from one belief to another be accurately reflected if not in chronological order? What does this reveal about the nature of her "movement"?
2. In "Human Being" what is the "childish formula" (l. 37) Levertov refers to? How else does she refer to the same tenor elsewhere in the poem and later in the collection? How does this "formula" shape or aid in her conversion? In what ways is the entire collection an example of this "formula"?
3. What does Levertov mean in "The Tide" when she claims that "Faith's a tide, it seems, ebbs and flows responsive / to action and inaction"? (l. 27-28). Where else in the collection does Levertov use water as an image? How does the meaning of the image change as the collection progresses? What other images appear throughout the text? What are "the stream" and the "the sapphire" of the book's title?

4. In “A Heresy” Levertov’ compares the Catholic belief in purgatory to reincarnation. What does this comparison reveal about Levertov’s awareness and concept of other religions? What other Catholic or Christian beliefs does Levertov refer to in the collection that have comparisons in other religions?
5. In “On the Parables of the Mustard Seed” and “Poetics of Faith” Levertov offers interpretations of two common New Testament stories which are often read to have different meanings. How do Levertov’s interpretations differ from your own readings of these stories? How does her treatment of each story reinforce the themes of the collection and reflect her feelings about her religion?

Bibliographic Information

Levertov, Denise. *The Stream and the Sapphire*. New York: New Directions, 1997.